



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 8 February 2023*

[Multimedia]

Catechesis. **The Apostolic Journey to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan**

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Last week I visited two African countries: the **Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan**. I thank God for permitting me to make this long-desired journey. Two “dreams”: to visit the Congolese people, custodians of an immense country, the green lung of Africa: together with Amazonia, they are the two lungs of the world. A land rich in resources and bloodied by a war that never ends, because there is always someone to fan the flames. And to visit the people of South Sudan, in a pilgrimage of peace together with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Moderator General of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields: we went together to bear witness that it is possible, and a duty, to collaborate in diversity, especially if one shares faith in Jesus Christ.

The first three days I was in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I renew my gratitude **to the President and to the country’s other authorities** for the welcome they accorded me. Immediately after my arrival, at the Presidential Palace, I was able to address a message to the nation: the Congo is like a diamond, for her nature, her resources, and especially for her people; but this diamond has become a source of contention, of violence, and paradoxically of the impoverishment of the people. It is a dynamic that is also found in other African regions, and which applies in general to that continent: a continent that has been colonized, exploited, plundered. In

the face of all this I said two words. The first is negative: “*Enough!*” Stop exploiting Africa! I have said several times that in the collective unconscious there is [the notion that] “Africa must be exploited”: enough of this! I have said that. The second is positive: *together*, together with dignity, all together, and with mutual respect, together in the name of Christ, our hope, to go forward. Do not exploit; go forth together.

And in the name of Christ, we gathered for the great Eucharistic celebration. Still in Kinshasa, various meetings then took place: with the victims of violence in the east of the country, the region that has been torn apart for years by war between armed groups manoeuvred by economic and political interests. I was not able to go to Goma. People live in fear and insecurity, sacrificed on the altar of illicit deals. I heard the shocking testimonies of some victims, especially women, who placed weapons and other instruments of death at the foot of the cross. With them I said “no” to violence, “no” to resignation, “yes” to reconciliation and hope. They have suffered a great deal, and continue to suffer.

I then met with the representatives of the various charitable organizations present in the country, to thank them and encourage them. Their work with the poor and for the poor does not make any noise, but day by day it makes the common good grow. And especially with advancement: charitable initiatives must always be first and foremost for advancement, not only for aid but for advancement. Aid yes, but advancement.

There was an exciting moment with Congolese young people and catechists in the stadium. It was like an immersion in the present, projected towards the future. Let us think of the strength of renewal that new generations of Christians, formed and inspired by the joy of the Gospel, can bring! I indicated five paths to them, to the young people: prayer, community, honesty, forgiveness and service. To the young people of the Congo, I said: your path is this: prayer, community life, honesty, forgiveness and service. May the Lord hear their cry that invokes peace and justice.

Then, in the Cathedral of Kinshasa, I met with priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and seminarians. There are many of them, and they are young, because vocations are plentiful: it is a grace of God. I urged them to be servants of the people as witnesses of Christ’s love, overcoming three temptations: spiritual mediocrity, worldly comfort and superficiality, which are, I would say, universal temptations for seminarians and priests. Certainly, spiritual mediocrity — when a priest succumbs to mediocrity — is sad; worldly comfort, that is, worldliness, which is one of the worst evils that can befall the Church; and superficiality. Finally, with the Congolese bishops I shared the joy and hardship of pastoral service. I invited them to let themselves be comforted by God’s closeness, and to be prophets for the people, with the strength of the Word of God, to be signs of how the Lord is, of the Lord’s attitude towards us: compassion, closeness, tenderness. They are three ways the Lord is with us: he draws close to us — closeness — with compassion and with tenderness. This is what I asked of the priests and bishops.

Then, the second part of the Journey took place in Juba, capital of South Sudan, a State that was born in 2011. This visit had a very special character, expressed by the motto that echoed Jesus' words: I pray that they may all be one (cf. *Jn* 17:21). Indeed, it was an ecumenical pilgrimage of peace, made together with the leaders of two Churches historically present in that land: the Anglican Communion and the Church of Scotland. It was the culmination of a journey undertaken some years ago, when we gathered [in Rome with the South Sudanese leaders in 2019](#), to take on the commitment to overcome conflict and to build peace. In 2019 there was a two-day spiritual retreat here, in the Curia, with all these politicians, with all these people aspiring to positions, some of them enemies, but they were all at the retreat. And this provided the strength to go forward. Unfortunately, the reconciliation process has not advanced much, and the nascent South Sudan is a victim of the old logic of power and rivalry, which produces war, violence, refugees and internally displaced persons. I am very thankful to Mr President for the welcome he gave us and for how he is trying to manage this path, which is not at all easy, in order to say “no” to corruption and to arms trafficking, and “yes” to encounter and dialogue. And this is shameful: many so-called “civilized” countries offer aid to South Sudan, and this aid consists of weapons, weapons, weapons, to foment war. This is a shame. And yes, pushing forward, saying “no” to corruption and arms trafficking, and “yes” to encounter and dialogue. Only in this way will there be development, people will be able to work in peace, the sick will be cared for, and children will go to school.

The ecumenical nature of the visit to South Sudan was manifested in particular in the [prayer meeting](#) held together with our Anglican Brothers and those of the Church of Scotland. Together we listened to the Word of God, together we raised prayers of praise, supplication and intercession. In a reality as highly conflictual as that of South Sudan, this sign is fundamental and not to be taken for granted, because unfortunately, there are those who abuse the name of God to justify violence and injustices.

Brothers and sisters, South Sudan is a country of around 11 million inhabitants — it is tiny! — of whom, as a result of the armed conflicts, two million are internally displaced and as many have fled to neighbouring countries. Therefore, I wished to [meet a large group of internally displaced persons](#), to listen to them and to make them feel the Church's closeness. Indeed, the Churches and organizations of Christian inspiration are on the front lines close to these poor people, who have lived in idp camps for years. In particular I addressed women — there are good women there! — who are the force that can transform the country, and I encouraged everyone to be seeds of a new South Sudan, without violence, reconciled and pacified.

Then, in the meeting with the pastors and consecrated persons of the local Church, we looked at Moses as a model of obedience to God and of perseverance in intercession.

And in the [Eucharistic celebration](#), the final act of the visit to South Sudan and of the entire Journey, I echoed the Gospel, encouraging Christians to be “salt and light” in that sorely troubled land. God places his hope not in the great and the powerful, but in the small and the humble. And

this is God's way of doing.

I thank the authorities of South Sudan, Mr President, the organizers of the Journeys and all those who invested their effort, their work, so that the trip could go well. I thank my brothers, Justin Welby and Iain Greenshields, for having accompanied me on this ecumenical journey.

Let us pray that, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in South Sudan, and in all of Africa, the seeds of his Kingdom of love, justice and peace may grow.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today's Audience, especially those from England and the United States of America. I offer a special greeting to the many student groups present. Upon all of you, and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Let us not forget the suffering of the Ukrainian people, so battered: with this cold, without light, without heating, and at war.

Lastly, as usual, my thoughts turn to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *the elderly* and to *newlyweds*. We are in the Novena preparing for the liturgical memory of the Blessed Virgin of Lourdes, who will be remembered next Saturday, 11 February. I invoke upon you the protection of the Immaculate Virgin, that she may always keep your heart joyful and sustain you on life's journey.

I offer my blessing to all of you.

APPEAL

My thoughts go, at this time, to the peoples of Turkey and Syria who have been hard hit by the earthquake, which has caused thousands of deaths and injuries. With emotion I pray for them and express my closeness to these people, to the families of the victims and to all those who are suffering from this devastating calamity. I thank all those working to provide aid, and I encourage everyone to show solidarity with those territories, some of them already battered by a long war. Let us pray together that these brothers and sisters of ours may move on, overcoming this tragedy, and let us ask Our Lady to protect them: "Hail Mary...".

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: My recent Apostolic Journey to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to South Sudan took me to two African countries rich in natural and human resources, yet plagued by war and violence. In Congo, I called for an end to the exploitation of Africa, appealed for peace and reconciliation, and encouraged the Christian community, and especially its many young people, to be a source of hope and renewal for the future of the nation. In South Sudan, I was joined by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Supreme Moderator of the Church of Scotland on an ecumenical pilgrimage for peace in that young country. Together we called for progress to be made in carrying out the peace agreement and prayed for an end to violence perpetrated in the name of God. I urged the nation's Christians and, in a special way, its women, to persevere in their witness of peace and their works of fraternal charity towards all the victims of conflict and injustice, particularly the great numbers of the displaced. May the seeds they sow in faith and hope bear rich fruit for a future of peace and the growth of God's kingdom of love, justice and peace.